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FISHING AT THE MILL POND

Scheme That Might Have Interested Or Surprised Isaac Walton,

Says Butler



ONCE in a while if you live in a Community where the word is passed around from mouth to mouth as the custom has been in the country for generations, you might get information that a mill pond is to be drained, and if you want the time of your life you are advised to be on hand and join in the fishing. Some times the announcement is expanded to include the assurance that the dam has not been opened for years and that when it is drained it will be effusive with fish. Also comes the further enlightenment that in that pond is the home of all the ancestors of the big fish of this country, and that you will be overwhelmed and submerged with fish if you happen to be around at the appointed hour. Also a lot of other wisdom is unloaded in connection with the event. You know how it is when you are figuring on going fishing. The world is big with hope and promise at that period in a man's life. Only an optimist could ever be a fisherman. A pessimist would never catch any fish except at the fish market. A candid historian will confess right here that as a rule the pessimist can guess better on a fishing expedition than the optimist can, but that does not justify the pessimist. Nothing does. If a man goes fishing and never even finds the creek he has more fun than if he lacked enough of hope to go at all. And all the time he hopes he gets satisfaction out of it. May be the pessimist has pleasure in chewing over his gloomy end of fearfulness, but if he has it is a mighty singular way he takes to show it, and his kind of pleasure is not the kind that you can pass around and share with your neighbors, so I still say I put my money on the fellow who has optimism enough to go fishing and to believe that he will catch something when he goes. He makes life worth living, and the earth a place worth living on. Yet as I say, honesty as a historian compels me to confess that the pessimist in his dolorous predictions is usually a better prophet than the optimist, for it is the experience of statistics that many a man goes fishing without having to send home for a wagon to bring his fish.

That is one reason why draining a mill pond makes a hit with us folks around here in the sticks. Philosophers tell you that men like to play the game. Watch them. You put a two-foot jack fish in a puddle of water six inches deep where your man can sneak up behind it and hit it a whack over the head with a club and kill it in three seconds of somewhat moderate excitement, and do you suppose he will put in half an hour trying to catch a gamey little bug six inches long that evades him until the last second? Not so my brother. He will swat the big fish and immediately get back to town with it, and put in the balance of the

afternoon making everybody believe that he is the original Jack Falstaff and that he struggled with that fish all the day before and through the night, and well along into the forenoon, before he could get it close enough to gaff, and take off of his single strand line, which it had so near worn through that he felt absolutely certain the line would never hold out until he landed it. When Old King David announced his conclusion that in his heart he had rated all men liars it is just possible he had been down at the postoffice when a bunch of fellows came over from the Jordan with a string of fish and that he stood around while they told him how the big ones got away. This fishing business gets away with a man's accuracy of vision frequently. Any way we like to imagine we are going to dig the fish out with a sawdust shovel, and if you give a man the least encouragement to think he can cord up around him a pile of fish as big as a winter's supply of wood you can lead him down to the mill pond without arguing the question very long.

But, jimminetty, fellers. Suppose you pay attention to one of these announcements of a dam to be drawn off and go down and see it. And think you want to fish. Let me paint you an impressionist word picture of what it looks like. Until the fateful date arrives you are as kitteny as a young pup in your effervescent enthusiasm. Will you lug them home in a bucket or a tow sack? Of course you can not string them on a willow crotch. It will be too small, and it is too much bother to go to all that trouble of stringing each one separately. Got to have something you can just dump them in and pound right along to the next grab. So maybe you compromise on a basket or a box in the car, or you can throw some papers on the bottom of the back part of the car and fill that. A car is a great institution for things of this sort. I brought home three bushels of peaches that way one day. Those in the bottom looked as if they had nervous prostration when we got the others out at the house, but it saved packing and to the family it looked like luxury to see that amount right there where they could all put their hands on it in a pile.

A mill pond is probably half a mile long, some longer, and some shorter. It is wide in proportion, and several feet deep. There is no bluff about it having fish. When you arrive if you come early you come too soon. If you do not come early you wish you had. You always see when you go fishing how it might have been planned differently. But come early and get all there is coming to you. It takes considerable time for all the water in a big mill pond to run away. To prevent the fish running away with the water a screen is built at the dam where the water is drawing away, and frequently in that screen is a pretty good catch of fish. However as the water begins to draw down the little pools around the edges begin to drain out, and then the hunt starts. You thought you would come with the city equipment, with your leggins properly